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ABSTRACT

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June 1975

A Survey of the Availability and Usage of Published Student Ratings Results

Marsali Hansen and Gerald M. Gillmore

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Educational Assessment Center Project: 298.

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The Educational Assessment Center (EAC) in revising the current Faculty Evaluation Forms made a major change by designing the last seven items to provide information to students as well as to the instructor of the course (Gillmore, Note 1). The major reason for making these ratings available was as an aid to future course selection. By written consent over 50% of the faculty using the forms agreed to have the results of these items published Fall Quarter of 1974, the first quarter of use of the Instructional Assessment System. It was to the problem of an effective method of publication that the following survey was addressed.

Due to the time limitation placed on the Center by the quarter system, some immediate yet inoffensive method of publication was needed. A reasonable goal seemed to be to have ratings published prior to the pre-registration of the following quarter. After much deliberation it was decided that for the sake of expediency the initial publication would be in the form of a booklet produced entirely at the expense of the Center (Gillmore, Note 2). The results of the individual professors' ratings within the booklet were placed alphabetically by department and in numerical order by class number. The ratings were presented in the form of percentage distribution with no comparative or normative information included. Approximately 1500 booklets were distributed to the locations on the official advising list and to locations arbitrarily decided upon by the Center as commonly frequented by students (libraries, information center, etc.). Three advertisements were placed in the campus newspaper (The Daily) by members of the Associated Students of the University of Washington TASK FORCE, who assisted in the project. Individual copies were not available to students; the copies placed in the aforementioned locations were restricted to use in that area.

The following survey was conducted to determine the effectiveness of the above method of distribution in making the information accessible to the students for whom it was intended.

Method

Sample.

The population surveyed consisted of students registering for Spring Quarter in Schmitz Hall, the larger of two registration locations on campus. Registration at the University of Washington lasts 8 days with students from different classes registering on different days. (See Appendix I, copy of Registration Schedule.) The survey was conducted the last 6 days of registration. It was decided in advance that no fewer than 50 students were to be surveyed on each day.

The surveyors consisted of three EAC office employees and two members of the ASUW TASK FORCE. All surveyors were students themselves and aware of the purpose of the survey as well as the survey method. The instructions were to approach the student within closest proximity to a given location and conduct the survey, from there proceeding to the next student. At times two interviewers were present in the registration area. Copies of the publication were present in the registration area. The surveyors also displayed a copy of the booklet to the student upon initiation of the survey.

The survey guide consisted of three avenues of questioning. (See Appendix II for the instrument used by the interviewers.) Initially the interviewer asked four questions: year in school, major, awareness of the publication, and whether or not an adviser had been seen this quarter. If the student was not aware of the publication the interviewer followed one line of questioning, the next question being does the student regularly read the Daily (the campus newspaper). The interviewer then asked the student whether, had he known the ratings were availabe, he would have consulted them. If the response was negative the student was asked why not. All students were asked the final question, for suggestions on making the booklet or material therein more accessible to them or other students.

If the student responded positively to the aforementioned question concerning his knowledge of the publication he was then asked if he had tried to make use of it. If a negative response was obtained to the question he was asked why not and then asked if he regularly read the campus newspaper. If a positive response was obtained to the question concerning

the use of the publication the student was asked where he had used it. He then was asked if he had found the publication useful. If the response was negative he was asked why not. If it was positive he was asked if it actually influenced his choice in courses. If the response to this question was positive the student was asked how the ratings had influenced his choices. All students who had actually used the ratings were asked how the information within the booklet could be presented as to be of more use.

If a student being interviewed had any questions concerning ratings, the booklet or the survey, the interviewers were instructed to reply. Limited variation on the wording of the questions, though not on the content or the order in which they were presented, was permitted.

Results

The sample of students interviewed consisted of 28 freshmen, 42 sophomores, 91 juniors, 96 seniors, 45 fifth year students, and 73 graduate students. The total number of students interviewed was 375. Table 1 shows the number and percentage of students who indicated their awareness of the publication.

Table 1

Students Who Responded Positively to the Question "Were You Aware that Student Ratings Were Available for Your Use?"

	Fresh	Soph	Junior	Senior	5th	Grad	Total
Number	5	24	59	43	23	37	191
% of students surveyed	18	58	54	45	63	51	50

As was mentioned in the method, the survey followed in two directions contingent on whether the student responded affirmatively or negatively to this first question. The results are presented following the same direction as the survey with the exception of the questions concerning accessibility of the information within the publication. This material is presented as a unit following the presentation of the directional questions.

Table 2 follows the direction formed by the positive response to the question presented in Table 1. The number of students responding positively to the second question of "Have you tried to make use of the publication of student ratings?" are shown. This table also shows the percentage these students are of the total number of students responding to the survey. In addition, in this table are the percentages of the students relative to only those who responded positively to the first question in Table 1.

Table 2

Students Who Responded Positively to the Question "Have You Tried to Make Use of the Publication of Student Ratings?"

	Fresh	Soph	Junior	Senior	5th	Grad	Total
Number	2	7	23	13	5	6	57
% of students surveyed	7	16	27	13	11	8	15
% of students responding positively to question on Table 1	40	29	39	30	21	10	29

Table 3 shows the reasons given by those students who responded engatively to the question in Table 2 for not using the publication. Note: this is following the direction of a positive response to the first question, i.e., these students were aware of the existence of the publication.

Table 3

Response to the Question "Having Known the Ratings Were Available Why Did You Not Use Them?"

Responses	Fresh	Soph	Junior	Senior	5th	Grad	Total
Inaccessible	2	4	4	4	4	1	19
Lack of time	1	3	3				7
Preplanned program			4	5	2	13	24
Foreknowledge of classes and profs		2	5	8	9	10	34
No interest	1	5	7	3	1	4	21

Those students presented in Table 2 were then asked "Were the ratings useful?" The positive responses are shown in Table 4. Again just the number of responses is presented, then this number expressed as a percentage of the entire sample surveyed and lastly as a percentage of those responding positively to the question on their awareness of the publication.

Table 4

Positive Responses to the Question "Were the Ratings Useful?"

	Fresh	Soph	Junior	Senior	5th	Grad	Total
Number	1	2	5	4	2	4	18
% of students surveyed	3	4	5	4	4	5	4
% of students responding positively to question on Table 1	20	8	8	9	8	10	9

The reasons of those students who responded negatively to the question "Were the ratings useful?" are presented in Table 5. These are students who were aware of the publication and did use it.

Table 5

Responses to Question "Why Didn't You Find the Publication Useful?"

	Fresh	Soph	Junior	Senior	5th	Grad	Total
Not enough courses and professors		3	14	6	1	2	26
Required courses			2		2		4
Wrong information					1		1

Table 6 shows from the students responding positively to the question "Did you find the ratings useful?" the number of students whose course selection was actually influenced by them. Again the second figures show the percentages the students are of the total and the third figures show the percentages the students are of those responding positively to the first question.

Table 6

Positive Responses to the Question "Did the Ratings Actually Influence Any of Your Choices?"

	Fresh	Soph	Junior	Senior	5th	Grad	Total
Number		1		2	1	1	5
% of students surveyed		2		2	2	1	1
% of total positive response to first question		4		4	4	2	2

Table 7 is the first table in the second direction pursued by the survey. In actuality this table is merely the reverse of Table 1, since it presents the number of negative responses to the question concerning awareness of publication.

Table 7

Negative Responses to the Question "Were You Aware that Student Ratings Were Available for Your Use?"

	Fresh	Soph	Junior	Senior	5th	Grad	Total
Number	23	18	42	53	17	36	189
% of total students surveyed	82	42	46	55	34	49	50

Continuing in the direction created by the negative response to the question of awareness, Table 8 shows the number of students who would have wanted to consult the ratings had they been aware of their publication. As in the other tables, the second row of figures is the percentage the students are of all students surveyed and the third row is the percentage these students are of those responding negatively to the question on awareness of publication.

Table 8

Positive Rcsponses to the Question "Had You Known the Ratings Were Available, Do You Feel You Would Have Wanted to Consult Them Before Making Your Course Selection?"

	Fresh	Soph	Junior	Senior	5th	Grad	Total
Number	20	18	35	34	14	18	139
% of students surveyed	71	42	38	35	31	24	37
% of students responding	86	100	83	64	82	50	78

Table 9 shows the reasons given by those students responding negatively to both the questions presented in Table 7 and Table 8 for not wanting to consult the ratings had they known of their availability.

Table 9

Responses to Question "Why Wouldn't You Use the Ratings if You Had Known They Were Available?"

Response	Fresh	Soph	Junior	Senior	5th	Grad	Total
Preplanned program			3	8		6	17
Word of mouth	1		2	1		2	6
No interest	1		4	8		5	18

The last tables concern the questions related to accessibility and presentation of the information within the publication. The first such table, Table 10, shows the response to the question concerning location of the publication: "Where did you use the publication?" Note, the students asked this question were only those responding positively to both the question concerning awareness of the publication and the question concerning use.

Table 10

Responses to the Question "Where Did You Use the Publication?"

	Fresh	Soph	Junior	Senior	5th	Grad	Total
Schmitz (Admissions)	1	4	15	7	2	4	33
Hub (Student Union Building)		1	4		2		7
Advising Offices		2	2	3	1	2	10
Library		1	3	1			5

All students were asked if they saw an adviser for course selection. The number of students responding positively and the percentage that this number is of the entire sample is presented in Table 11.

Table 11

Positive Responses to the Question "Did You See an Adviser for Course Selection?"

	Fresh	Soph	Junior	Senior	5th	Grad	Total
Number	10	18	25	20	11	28	112
% of students surveyed	35	42	27	20	24	38	29

Both students who responded negatively to the question concerning awareness of the publication and students responding negatively to the question concerning use of the publication were asked if they regularly read the Daily. The number of these students responding positively, the percentage this number is of all students surveyed, and the percentage this number is of students asked this question are presented in Table 12.

The last two tables concern the publication itself. Table 13 shows the responses of students to the question "How could the presentation of the information within the publication be improved?" This question was asked of those students responding positively to the question "Have you tried to make use of the publication of Student Ratings?" Table 14 shows the response of students to the question "How could the distribution of the information within the publication be improved?" This question was asked of all students surveyed.

Table 12

Negative Responses to the Question "Do You Regularly Read the Daily?"[a]

	Fresh	Soph	Junior	Senior	5th	Grad	Total
Number	17	26	40	56	17	39	195
% of students surveyed	60	61	43	58	37	53	52
% of students asked question	65	74	60	70	50	60	63

[a] Only includes students who did not use the publication.

Table 13

Responses to the Question "How Could the Presentation of Information Be Improved?"

Response	Fresh	Soph	Junior	Senior	5th	Grad	Total
Fine as is		2	13	2	1		
More professors		2	4	2	1	1	
Increase amount published		1	1	3	2		
Publish course description			1	1	1		

Table 14

Responses to the Question "How Could We Improve the Distribution of the Information Contained within the Publication?"

Response	Fresh	Soph	Junior	Senior	5th	Grad	Total
More publicity	1	6	12	17	2	4	42
Posters	2	2	3	13	1	8	29
Put in the Daily	2	4	9		1	4	20
Put in the Time Schedule	4	2	2	2	1	4	15
Individual copies	2	1	4	7	1	4	19
Newspaper articles	1			1		1	3
Sell it		1	1	2		2	6
Put in more places	1	2	1	4	5	4	17

Discussion

Through the administration of a survey to 375 students at the time of registration, the EAC attempted to obtain student opinion on several questions concerning the publication of faculty ratings for student use. The issues in question were: did the students think there was actually a need for the publication of the information, was the EAC meeting the need with their publication, and if not, what exactly was ineffective.

The results of the survey show that only 50% of the students interviewed were aware of the survey. Of the 50% who were unaware, however, 86% of the freshmen, 100% of the sophomores, 83% of the juniors and actually 78% of the total students who were unaware would have liked to have used the publication. Of those students who were aware of the publication, 29% actually tried to use it. Of those who knew of the publication but failed to use it, the primary reasons given by the underclassmen were its inaccessibility and their own lack of time. The primary reasons given by the upperclassmen and graduate students were the inflexibility of their own schedules to accommodate such information and their foreknowledge of professors and classes. From these results, then, it appears that students do want the information provided by the publication, but that the need appears strongest among the underclassmen.

As to the question of whether the publication provided by the EAC met tne needs of the students, only 9% of the students who were aware of the ratings found them useful, 20% of whom were freshmen, and only 2% of the students were actually influenced by the ratings. It appears then that the publication of the data from Fall Quarter, 1974, was ineffective.

The primary reason given by students for its ineffectiveness was the relatively small number of courses listed. The response to the question "How could the information be presented more effectively?" generally indicated the publication was fine with the exception of not enough classes had results published.

The other cause for the ineffectiveness of the publication indicated by the survey was the location and publicity of its existence. Though 29% of the students surveyed saw an adviser for course selection (112 students),

only 10 indicated they had used the publication in the advising office. Most students who used the publication used it at Schmitz Hall, the location of registration. It appears, then, that the advising centers were not the most effective locations for the use of the publication.

Since 50% of the students surveyed were totally unaware of the publication, publicity was definitely a problem. As was mentioned in the introduction, 3 half-page advertisements were placed in the Daily. However, 62% of those students who had been either unaware of the publication or had been aware and not used it, do regularly read the Daily. This publicity apparently was not sufficient to inform the students of the publication.

The major problems presented by the survey for the future of the publication are to better inform the students of its existence and location. and to present more material within the publication. The problem of an effective method of presentation was asked of all the students surveyed. The majority of students felt more publicity was needed, or posters. A sufficient number of students suggested the ratings be put in the Daily or in the Time Schedule. A number suggested individual copies. All these suggestions are presently under consideration by the EAC.

As to the problem of the material within the publication, as was mentioned in the introduction, 55% of the professors rated had their ratings published. At the present time probably less than 50% of the courses offered are currently being surveyed. This is the first quarter the ratings were published and many courses offered in the fall are not offered in the spring. Therefore, the dissatisfaction of the students that the course or courses they were looking for were not in the publication was probably valid, even though in all the booklet contained information on over 800 courses. Very few courses are taught by the same professor two quarters in a row. Subsequent quarters, data from more courses will be available. However, the only manner in which a professor's ratings are published is with his consent. Publication is not mandatory. Therefore the EAC has no solution short of faculty senate action for the problem of the extensiveness of the publication in supplying the needed information.

It does appear , based upon one survey of 375 students, that the information as it is presented is desired by the students. However, two obstacles block the effectiveness of the publication, the first being distribution and the second being quantity of information being presented. Importantly, however, it should be emphasized that this survey was taken after the first term of use of the Instructional Assessment System. The extent to which many of the problems discussed above will be ameliorated with the passage of time is still an open question. Future surveys, similar to this, will be undertaken to make this determination.

Reference Notes

1. Gillmore, G. M. A brief description of the University of Washington Instructional Assessment System (EAC Report 276). Seattle: University of Washington, Educational Assessment Center, 1974.
2. Gillmore, G. M. Instructional Assessment System: Responses to items for student use, Autumn Quarter, 1974 (EAC Report). Seattle: University of Washington, Educational Assessment Center, 1974.

Appendix I

Preregistration Schedule

Freshmen	February 19
Seniors	February 20
Graduates	February 21
Fifth year	February 24
Juniors	February 25
Sophomores	February 26

Hello, I'm from the Educational Assessment Center and we're conducting a survey on the usage of our publication of Faculty Ratings

What year are you in school? _____ What's your major? _____

[ ] NO Were you aware that Student Ratings were available for your use? [ ] YES

Did you see an advisor for your course selection? NO [ ] YES [ ]

Do you regularly read the Daily? NO [ ] YES [ ]

Had you known ratings were available, do you feel you would have wanted to consult them before making your course selections? [ ] NO [ ] YES [ ]

If not, why not? _____

Have you tried to make use of the publication of Student Ratings? [ ] NO [ ] YES

If not, why not _____

Where did you use the ratings booklet?

Were the ratings useful? [ ] NO [ ] YES

Why not? _____

Did they actually influence any of your choices? [ ] NO [ ] YES

How? _____

Do you regularly read the Daily? [ ] NO [ ] YES

How could the information within the booklet be presented so as to be of more use? _____

Do you have any suggestions as to how we could make the booklet more accessible to you? _____